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RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS PRIORITY 6325
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RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 1152
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 1778
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UNCLAS TEL AVIV 000802

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

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NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR X0XX
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CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

1. Mideast
2. U.S.-Israel Relations

Key stories in the media:

All media led with the murder of a 13-year-old boy and the wounding of a seven-year-old boy when an axe-wielding Palestinian man attacked them in the settlement of Bat Ayin in Gush Etzion

yesterday. (The wounded boy's father is a jailed Jewish terrorist.) According to Israel Radio security sources denied that the lifting of roadblocks allowed the attack. Maariv cited the IDF's concern that Jewish settlers might avenge the murder.

Maariv quoted senior cabinet ministers as saying that FM Avigdor Lieberman is an embarrassment to the government. Former Education Minister Yuli Tamir was quoted as saying in an interview with the Arabic-language Assennara that the damage that this Government will bring upon Israel will be huge. This morning, speaking on Israel Radio, former FM Tzipi Livni said that Lieberman erased the peace process in twenty seconds and deplored PM Benjamin Netanyahu's silence on the matter. Major media quoted Egyptian FM Ahmed Abu al-Gheit as saying that he will not shake Lieberman's hand. Media reported that yesterday, speaking to an audience of Kadima members, outgoing PM Ehud Olmert emphasized the importance of the two-state solution. Citing remarks by State Department Spokesman Robert Wood, Yediot reported that the U.S. administration is determined to compel Israel to recognize Palestinian statehood.

In response to Lieberman's statements, Yasser Abed Rabbo, member of the PLO's Executive Committee was quoted as saying at an interview with the Arabic-language Assennara that they will not sit down to negotiations with such a madman. "Those who chose him as foreign minister deserve to show this face of Israel to the world." When questioned whether there are promises given by the new US's administration's envoy he said that they haven't yet held deep discussions and that without halting the settlement growth, especially in Jerusalem, there is no place for more negotiations which would distract the world from the true plan of this extreme government chosen by Israel.

Leading media reported that yesterday police questioned Lieberman for more than seven hours about suspicions of bribery, money laundering, fraud and breach of trust, less than a day after he took office in the new government.

The media reported that Syrian President Bashar Assad told the Qatari newspaper A-Sharq that Syria would soon liberate the Golan "by peace or war." HaQaretz reported that FM Lieberman responded coolly to the idea of talks with Damascus. "There is no cabinet resolution regarding negotiations with Syria, and we have already said that we will not agree to withdraw from the Golan Heights," he said. "Peace will only be in exchange for peace."

The Jerusalem Post quoted Washington analysts as saying that the mixed messages on Iran conveyed by Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Gen. David Petraeus highlight the different roles played by Gates, a political appointee implementing the Obama administration's program, and military personnel who are advocating certain policy goals. Makor Rishon-Hatzofe quoted PM Netanyahu as saying in an interview with The Atlantic Monthly that if the U.S. does not stop Iran, Israel will.

The Arabic-language Kull Al Arab reported that there are suspicions that an Israeli Arab organization calling itself QAhrar Al Jaleel [Free people of the Galilee] or another secret group were behind last week's Lev Hamifratz mall [car bomb] in Haifa.

The Media Line reported that the U.S. Embassy in Israel opened an American Corner cultural center in post-riot Acco in the presence of Ambassador Cunningham.

Leading media reported that a Spanish court ruled to suspend a suit against Israeli politicians and military officers regarding the killing of 14 Palestinian civilians in the 2002 bombing of the house of Hamas terrorist Salah Shehadeh.

Yediot reported that this week Iranian Ayatollah Mehdi Khurshidi, who was Ayatollah Khomeini's deputy, visited Israel. He was quoted as saying that the weapons and money that the Revolutionary Guards inject into terror are more dangerous to Israel than nuclear weapons.

The media reported that Tel Aviv started celebrating the centennial of its foundation. A festive popular rally will take place in Rabin Square tomorrow night.

Makor Rishon-Hatzofe cited a poll conducted by the international Arabic-language newspaper Ash-Sharq Al-Awsat whose results are a reversal of the recent trend: Mahmoud Abbas now enjoys the support of 64% of Palestinians, while 36% back Ismail Haniyeh. Marwan Barghouti remains the leading contender to lead the PA.

Yediot cited an Israeli poll according to which three quarters of the world population view Israel as an aggressive country. India, the U.S., and Russia are the countries most sympathetic to Israel; France and Spain are the most hostile to Israel.

The Arabic-language newspapers Assennara and Kull Al Arab reported that the GOI hasn't yet forwarded the promised budget for the Pope's visit preparations.

1. Mideast:

Summary:

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar commented in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "It is doubtful whether [Israeli] arguments claiming that the other side was also disruptive will convince Barack Obama to ignore the continued settlement construction and not removing the outposts. It will be particularly difficult because unlike the previous government, the new one did not shield the occupation with words of peace."

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "This was an inept performance by our novice foreign minister, no question. Nevertheless, Annapolis has become just another footnote in the 100-year history of Palestinian rejectionism."

Senior columnist and longtime dove Yoel Marcus wrote in Ha'aretz: "[Lieberman] is in complete accord with Netanyahu, who in his inauguration speech said that Israel does not want to control the Palestinians, but rather aspires to full peace with the entire Arab and Muslim world."

The nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe editorialized: "Through the Annapolis Conference, [Olmert and Livni] decided to surrender to the inaction of the Palestinians and the Americans regarding the implementation of the Roadmap."

Jonathan Speyer, a senior research fellow at the Global Research in International Affairs Center at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in Ha'aretz: "The only regional state capable of mounting a real resistance to the westward march of Iranian power is the one against whom all Arab League members can still momentarily unite in displays of verbal ferocity -- namely, Israel."

Block Quotes:

1. "An Excuse to Abandon Peace"

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar commented in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (4/3): "Not only did [yesterday's axe-wielding] attack ruin the marred welcome for Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman by the international community, but it reminded them of days past with incoming right-wing governments, which transformed such events into Defensive Shields against diplomatic talks and as excuses for setting up more settlements. Indeed, at the ceremony in which Lieberman took over as Foreign Minister, he suggested that the new government will fall back on old formulas. First we will eradicate the terrorist infrastructure -- and then, only God knows. Lieberman's demand that the Palestinian Authority do away with Hamas in the Gaza Strip -- a task which the mighty IDF has not met -- undermines his declared commitment to the Roadmap for peace.... It is doubtful whether arguments claiming that the other side was also disruptive will convince Barack Obama to ignore the continued settlement construction and not removing the outposts. It will be particularly difficult because unlike the previous government, the new one did not shield the occupation with

words of peace.

II. "Who Killed Annapolis?"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (4/3): QActually, the cabinet did endorse Annapolis, on December 2, 2007.... But the thing is, Annapolis is dead -- just as Lieberman so undiplomatically stated. And everyone knows it. It died when Mahmoud Abbas and Ahmed Qurei rejected Olmert's and Tzipi Livni's offer last year of virtually the entire West Bank (the Palestinians already have Gaza), plus tracts of the Negev to make up for strategic settlement blocs retained beyond the Green Line.... By talking tough instead of talking smart, Lieberman claimed he won Qrespect.Q In fact, he handed an unnecessary win to those who misrepresent Israel's stance by arguing that it is blocking the creation of a Palestinian state. This was an inept performance by our novice foreign minister, no question. Nevertheless, Annapolis has become just another footnote in the 100-year history of Palestinian rejectionism.

III. "They Stole My Headline"

Senior columnist and longtime dove Yoel Marcus wrote in Ha'aretz (4/3): QTo retain power, Bibi has from the outset surrendered to power bases -- Yisrael Beiteinu and Shas -- and sold them the goods for a pittance. The appointment of Avigdor Lieberman as foreign minister constitutes a challenge to the United States, the European Union, and our neighbors. Lieberman has not held back: On his first day on the job he already declared that the principles of the Annapolis process are not binding on us and that peace will not be achieved through concessions. In this he is in complete accord with Netanyahu, who in his inauguration speech said that Israel does not want to control the Palestinians, but rather aspires to Qfull peace with the entire Arab and Muslim world.Q Only a fool would fail to notice the sleight of hand, or tongue, in this when the first condition for making peace with the Qentire Arab worldQ must be recognizing and implementing the principle of two states for two peoples.

IV. QA New Government in Jerusalem

The nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe editorialized (4/3): QIt was obvious that the Annapolis outline was the platform on which Kadima, led by Tzipi Livni, ran... Through the Annapolis Conference, the two decided to surrender to the inaction of the Palestinians and the Americans regarding the implementation of the Roadmap.... It appears that, despite the objections of some Israeli and foreign newspapers, there is a new Israeli government.

IV. QArab Summit, Iranian Agenda

Jonathan Speyer, a senior research fellow at the Global Research in International Affairs Center at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in HaQaretz (4/3): QThe issues that dominated the 21st Arab League summit in Doha, Qatar, this week testified to the weakness and disunity of the Arab states. Sunni Arabs are the majority population group in the Middle East. Yet the Doha agenda reflected a regional reality dominated by the interests of, and clash between, two strong but non-Arab countries -- Israel and Iran.... Doha signaled that for the moment the Iranian star in the region is on the rise, with the leading states of the Arab system -- Egypt and Saudi Arabia -- reduced to scolding and attempted bribery respectively in their efforts to limit its influence. It is perhaps the final ironic testimony to the Arabs' weakness that the only regional state capable of mounting a real resistance to the westward march of Iranian power is the one against whom all Arab League members can still momentarily unite in displays of verbal ferocity -- namely, Israel.

12. U.S.-Israel Relations:

Summary:

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: QIt must be hoped that Netanyahu understands reality: [The

United States] is the superpower, not us.... BushQs America is dead.

Block Quotes:

"Talk Softly to Obama"

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (4/3): QThe husband of the current Secretary of State, who used to be President of the U.S., asked his entourage at the conclusion of a meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu in 1996: QWhat the heck, he is convinced that Israel is the superpower, not us. It must be hoped that Netanyahu understands reality: [The United States] is the superpower, not us. We should talk quietly, not preach; listen too, sometimes. BushQs America is dead. Obama is the new President. Contrary to Israel, this cannot change. Netanyahu must understand that his Evangelical and neo-Conservative admirers, who ruled America during the past eight years, are no more. Against this background, it will be interesting to see whom he will appoint ambassador in Washington.

CUNNINGHAM